Stages of Change: Questions to Ask and Actions to Consider

Below are the stages of change in addition to questions that you can ask individuals to assist you in determining at what stage individuals might be in the change process. In addition, following the questions, are action steps that might prove useful in engaging and empowering the person to move through the stages. You will not necessarily begin asking questions in stage one (1). Based on information already obtained, you may have a sense of what stage the person is in, and may choose to begin asking questions related to that stage to verify that the person is truly in that stage.

Stage 1: Precontemplation

- “Who do you think needs to make the changes in this situation? Why?”
- “Isn’t there anything that you would like to change in the way you handle your child’s behavior? If not, why? If so, what would you like to change?”
- “If you were to change any of the ways in which you parent your child, what would you change?”

Action Step: Provide information and feedback to raise the person's awareness of the problem and the possibility of change. Do not give prescriptive advice.

Stage 2: Contemplation

- “If you’re not satisfied with the way things have been and wanted to change one thing about your parenting of your child, what might that be?”
- “What do you think might be a safer type of discipline to use with your child?”
- “What behavior(s) do you think you need to do differently for your child to be able to come home and be safe?”
- “What would you like to do differently when you get upset with your child’s behavior?”

Action Step: Help the person tip the balance in favor of change. Help the person see the benefits of changing and the consequences of not changing.

Stage 3: Determination

- “What are the steps in the plan that you have made?”
- “Do you have a plan to help you make this change? If so, what does it look like?”
- “How will you know you have been successful in making this change?”

Action Step: Help the person find a change strategy that is realistic, acceptable, accessible, appropriate, and effective.
Stage 4: Action
- “What step are you working on now?”
- “How are you doing with this change?”
- “What are the things that are easy for you to change?”
- “What are the things that you’ve been finding to be a challenge?”

Action Step: Support and be an advocate for the person. Help accomplish the steps for change.

Stage 5: Maintenance
- “What are you doing to keep the change going?”
- “What helps you to be so successful in maintaining the change?”
- “On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most confident and 1 not being confident at all, how confident are you that you will maintain this change over this next week?”
- “Does the change seem like it’s permanent, now? What makes you believe this?”
- “Do you still have to think about doing this the new way, or does it feel pretty automatic, now?”
- “What are you doing to keep from going back to the old way of doing this?”

Action Step: Help the person identify the possibility of relapse and identify and use strategies to prevent relapse.

Stage 6: Relapse
- “When was your last relapse? What led to the relapse and what are your plans for getting past it and avoiding another relapse?”
- “Has there been a time since your last relapse that you felt like relapsing, but didn’t? If there was, what kept you from using?”
- “What keeps you from having another relapse?”

Action Step: Help the person holistically look at the situation.